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ABSTRACT

The Honors Program at Northern State University (South Dakota) is an ongoing, enriched program for academically talented and highly motivated students. Its purposes are to (1) stimulate creativity, intellectual curiosity, and critical evaluation of ideas and behavior; (2) enhance skills in critical research, writing, and speaking; and (3) develop capacity for independent learning. High school seniors with an American College Testing Program score of 24 or above and ranking in or near the top 25% of their graduating class are invited to participate, and currently-enrolled university students with a grade point average of 3.25 or above or who can otherwise demonstrate a commitment to the program's goals are encouraged to apply for admission. Eighteen credit hours are required for program graduation, including an honors thesis of up to 6 credit hours and up to 6 hours of honors work in connection with regularly-scheduled upper division courses in the student's major. The remaining credits are taken in elective honors courses. Over 100 students have participated in the program in four years. Problems preventing the program from achieving its goals and potential include a low completion rate, chronic faculty shortage in areas of heaviest demand, and administrative policy concerning faculty participation and workload. Four references. (MSE)

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The Honors Program

Northern State University

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AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project is funded with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University.

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Abstract

The Honors Program is an ongoing, enriched program for academically talented and highly motivated students. The purposes of the program are: 1) to stimulate creativity, intellectual curiosity, and critical evaluations of ideas and behavior; 2) to enhance the skills of critical research, writing, and speaking; and 3) to develop the capacity for independent learning.

For recruitment purposes, high school seniors who have an ACT score of 24 or above and rank in or near the top 25% of their graduating class are invited to join the program. Currently enrolled students who have a GPA of 3.25 or above, or who can otherwise demonstrate a commitment to the goals of the program are encouraged to apply for admission.

For a curriculum, a total of 18 credit hours is required for graduation from the program. This includes an honors thesis (HON 395) for up to 6 credit hours. Students may also elect to take up to 6 credit hours of honors work in connection with regularly scheduled upper-division courses in their major. The remaining credit hours are taken in elective honors courses.

One hundred four students have participated in the Honors Program since its inception four years ago. The performance of the Program is analyzed in terms of curricular, staffing, and funding issues faced by the Honors Program. Recommendations for future goals, both long and short term, are discussed.

Introduction

Beginning in the early 1970's, American higher education has witnessed a steady growth in the number of small colleges and universities offering an Honors Program as part of their curriculum (Jackson, 1986). While these programs usually emphasize either academic enrichment or acceleration as their goals, no definitive curriculum model exists (Cohen, 1985; Gabelnick, 1986; Grey, 1985).

This report will detail the Northern State University Honors Program as one example of how such a program can operate. The issues that precipitated the establishment of the Program will be discussed, and the Program's current policies and procedures will be detailed. Finally, the Program's strengths and weaknesses will be examined, and directions for future development will be explored.

Background

Initial planning for the Northern State University Honors Program took place during the 1983-1984 academic year. At the behest of Present Terence M. Brown, the President's Fellows under the leadership of Dr. Janice M. Jirouch conducted an analysis of the potential for establishing an Honors Program. Their investigations focused on the objectives for the Program, its place in the overall curriculum of the institution, and means of countering possible arguments against the Program.

The primary goal that was established for the Honors Program was for it to provide an opportunity for academically talented and highly motivated students to pursue their studies in a depth and

breadth commensurate with their abilities. The purposes of the Program would be to stimulate creativity, intellectual curiosity and critical evaluation of ideas; to develop the skills critical inquiry, writing, speaking, and capacity for independent learning; and to provide for the association of serious students with faculty and students of like mind.

In reference to the Program's role in the overall curriculum of the institution, the Honors Program was conceptualized as the creative arm of the university. It should not try to duplicate what is already being done well. Instead, the Program should focus on doing what the university, given its historical and currently mandated mission, is either not doing or not doing well.

In this regard, it was recognized that the Honors Program would likely have a number of critics and detractors among the campus community, and that these criticisms would need to be effectively countered if the Program was to be successful. It was anticipated that the Program would be attacked as being elitist. This was countered by steps such as not having separate housing for Honors students. Another potential criticism was that the Honors Program would attract the best students out of regular sections of courses. This was countered by limiting to 18 semester hours the number of credits to be taken in Honors, and by emphasizing the role of an Honors Program in attracting more good students to Northern State University than might otherwise enroll. A final possible criticism was that the Honors Program would serve to simply recruit majors for the liberal arts. This was countered

by emphasizing the interdisciplinary nature of the Program, and involving non-liberal arts faculty in the development of an Honors curriculum.

With the foundation for the Northern State University Honors Program in place, Dr. Walter J. King was selected by President Brown as the Program's first Director, and the first group of students was admitted to the Program at the start of the fall semester, 1985. Dr. King served until December, 1986, at which time Dr. Barbara Temple-Thurston was appointed as Director. Dr. Temple-Thurston served until June, 1988, at which time Dr. Rodney G. Triplet was appointed as Director.

Description

I. Goals.

The Honors Program is for academically oriented and motivated students. The purposes of the program are 1) to stimulate creativity, intellectual curiosity, and critical evaluation of ideas and behavior; 2) to enhance the skills of research, writing, and speaking; and 3) to develop the capacity for independent learning.

The Honors Program provides opportunities to associate with students of similar motivations and interests, and to work closely with one's professors. An Honors Center has been established to enable honors students to meet faculty and each other in a friendly, informal, atmosphere.

II. Target population.

High school seniors who have an ACT of 24 or above and

rank in or near the top 25% of their graduating class. Also, currently enrolled Northern students who have a GPA of 3.25 or above, or who are otherwise committed to the objectives of the program. Depending on course enrollments, a select number of students from the departments offering Honors courses may also be invited to participate.

III. Staffing requirements.

The Honors Program staff consists of a Director, who receives a one-quarter reduction in his/her teaching load as compensation. The Director's position is equivalent to that of a department Chairperson. However, since the Honors Program is interdisciplinary in scope, the Director reports directly to the Vice President for Academic Affairs instead of through a divisional Dean. The Director is assisted by a part-time work-study secretary. A seven member Honors Advisory Committee consults with the Director on matters of admissions, policy, and curriculum. Membership on the Advisory Committee is voluntary, with the limitation that every academic division (Arts and Sciences, Business, Fine Arts, and Education) has at least one faculty member serving on the Advisory Committee.

At least three faculty teach an Honors course each semester. The faculty is regularly polled as to their interest in teaching an Honors course, and those who are interested are encouraged to submit a course proposal. Faculty are then selected by the Director and the Advisory

Committee on the basis of the proposed Honors course, and the perceived student demand for a proposed course. Faculty teaching an Honors course count it as part of their regularly assigned load.

IV. Costs.

The Honors Program operates on an annual budget of $1,000. This is broken down into three categories: 1) Supplies and Materials--$500 (primarily promotional materials for student recruitment purposes); 2) Contractual Services--$200 (telephone and office equipment maintenance); and 3) Travel--$300 (the Director is expected to attend the meetings of the National Collegiate Honors Council and the Upper Midwest Honors Council).

V. Admission to the Program.

High school seniors who have applied for, and have been admitted to Northern, and who have an ACT of 24 or above and rank in or near the top 25% of their graduating class will be invited to join the Honors Program. Admission to the program will be dependent upon receipt of a signed statement accepting the invitation.

Currently enrolled students who can demonstrate that they have made a commitment to the objectives of the program are encouraged to apply for admission in writing to the Director and to provide two letters of recommendation from Northern State faculty. This application is subject to the review and approval of the Honors Faculty Committee.

Suggested guidelines for the admission of currently enrolled students include having achieved a 3.25 GPA, or some other indication of scholastic or creative ability.

VI. Enrollment in classes.

Members of the Honors Program will be given priority for enrollment in Honors courses. Any openings still left after Honors students have preregistered will be made available on a first-come first-served basis to any student upon the recommendation of the course instructor and the approval of the Director. Suggested guidelines for registration of non-Honors students include having achieved a 3.25 GPA, or some other indication of scholastic or creative ability.

Preregistration of Honors courses will utilize the following procedure:

1. All students enrolling in Honors courses will need to present to the Registrar's Office a green, permission to enroll form signed by the instructor and the Director.
2. Honors students will be mailed via campus mail a description of the next semester's courses two weeks prior to the start of preregistration.
3. Honors students will notify the Director of which Honors course(s) they intend to preregister for. This can be accomplished either in person, by campus mail, or by telephone.
4. The Director will fill out the permission to enroll

forms requested by Honors students, obtain the necessary signatures, and return the forms via campus mail by the first day of preregistration. The Director will then notify each instructor of how many openings remain in their class.

5. Non-Honors students will need to obtain permission to enroll forms from the Registrar's Office, and obtain the required signatures in person.

VII. Continuation in the Program.

A 3.25 GPA is required for continuation in and graduation from the Honors Program. Students who do not maintain a 3.25 GPA will be suspended from the Program. Suspended students may apply for readmission to the program. All readmissions will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the Director and the Honors Faculty Committee.

Suggested guidelines for readmission to the Program include having reachieved a 3.25 GPA, or some other indication of scholastic or creative ability.

VIII. Honors Thesis.

The Honors Thesis will be offered for variable credit of 3 to 6 hours. The student's advisor will recommend the number of credit hours to be awarded following the successful defense of the thesis. This recommendation will be subject to review and approval of the Director and the Honors Faculty Committee.

IX. Contract Courses.

A contract course is defined as when a student in a regularly scheduled course "contracts" to do extra work over and above the usual assignments, or to do assignments of a significantly different nature than those normally assigned, for purposes of being awarded honors credit.

Honors students may petition to take a regularly scheduled upper-division course in his/her major field for honors credit. The student in his/her proposal must indicate what he/she will be doing in addition to, or instead of, the regular course requirements.

The instructor of the course must also submit in writing that he/she supports the petition and agrees to insure the student's adherence to the proposed plan of study. Each petition will be subject to review and approval by the Director and the Honors Faculty Committee.

No more than six credit hours of contract courses may be counted towards graduation from the Program.

X. Curriculum.

In collaboration with the Department of Literature and Language, a section of ENGL 104H--English Composition will be offered every Fall Semester, and a section of ENGL 204H--Introduction to Literature will be offered every Spring Semester. These courses will serve to build a sense of continuity and community among the students.

In selecting Honors Seminars, preference will be given

to seminars that substitute for general education requirements and/or are cross-listed by at least two departments.

Results

All results presented in this report reflect the current status of an ongoing program. The data has been compiled from records kept by the Honors Program Director.

A total of 104 students have enrolled in the Honors Program since its inception in 1985. Of this group, 88 are still enrolled at Northern State University. Except for the 1985-1986 academic year, enrollment patterns for new students entering the Honors Program have held relatively steady. This data is presented in Table 1.

Table 1:

Enrollment by Year in the

Northern State University Honors Program

1985 -- 8 students

1986 -- 22 students

1987 -- 22 students

1988 -- 26 students

1989 -- 26 students

Students are classified as "active" if they have enrolled in at least one Honors course, "inactive" if they have not enrolled

in any Honors courses, or "suspended" if their GPA has fallen below 3.25. Using these criteria, 77 (65 currently enrolled) students are classified as active, 23 (20 currently enrolled) students are classified as inactive, and 4 (3 currently enrolled) have been suspended.

Student progress through the Program is monitored by the number of credit hours completed in Honors courses. This data is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Credit Hours Completed in Honors Courses

Credit Hours	Students
0	54
3	30
6	11
9	3
12	3
15	1
18	1
21	1

It should be pointed out that among the 54 students listed as having completed no credits are the 26 new freshmen who will be entering the Program with the Fall 1989 semester. Of these 26, 25 have preregistered to take at least one Honors course.

To date, one student has completed the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program. This individual received her diploma in May 1988, and is currently pursuing her graduate education at Northern Illinois University. Two students are currently working on their Honors Theses, and intend to graduate in May 1990.

Twenty two Honors courses have been offered. Fourteen courses have been offered by faculty from the School of Arts and Sciences (Anthropology--1 course, Biology--2 courses, English--4 courses, History--2 courses, Mathematics--1 course, Political Science--2 courses, Sociology--2 courses). Three courses have been offered by faculty from the School of Fine Arts (Art--2 courses, Music--1 course). Three courses have been offered by faculty from the School of Business (Business Administration--1 course, Economics--1 course, Industrial Technologies--1 course). Finally, two courses have been offered by faculty from the School of Education (Psychology--2 courses). An average of five students have enrolled in each course.

Conclusions and Recommendations

A number of problems exist that have prevented the Honors Program from fulfilling its goals and potentials. Much of the data presented in the preceding section of this report are symptomatic of these problems. The Program has experienced an extremely low rate of students completing the requirements for graduation. Only one out of 104 students has so far completed the Program. No significant increase in the number of students

completing the Program is anticipated in the immediate future. Currently, 81% of the students in the Program have completed three credit hours or less in Honors. Even if one does not count the 26 freshmen who are entering this fall, that still leaves 52% of the students showing little or no progress towards fulfilling Program requirements.

The fundamental issues facing the Honors Program are a chronic shortage of faculty in those academic divisions experiencing the heaviest student demand, and the policy that an Honors course is counted as part of a faculty member's regular teaching load.

Two no-cost alternatives are presently being implemented in an attempt to address the problems faced by the Honors Program. First, contract courses (defined in the Description section, above) will allow students to take up to six credit hours of regularly scheduled upper-division courses in their major for Honors credit. While this cannot provide the same educational experience as a separate Honors seminar, it does allow students majoring in non-liberal-arts disciplines a chance to complete the requirements of the Program. Second, it is possible to regularly schedule Honors sections of two English courses that form an important component of Northern State University's general education program with minimal impact on that department's staffing needs. This will provide incoming freshmen Honors students with a solid, core, Honors experience. If Honors students take advantage of both of these options, they will have

satisfied two-thirds of the credit hours required for graduation from the Program.

Honors Program admission procedures have also recently been streamlined in order to increase the percentage of eligible freshmen who participate in the Program. Previously, only about 1.6% of an incoming freshman class enrolled in the Program. Over half of the students enrolling in any given year were sophomores, juniors, or seniors, and they usually enrolled in order to take a single Honors course with no intention of completing the Program. The new procedure (detailed in the Description section, above) has resulted in a 268% increase in the number of incoming freshmen enrolling in the Program, bringing their numbers up to 4.3% of the total incoming class. Furthermore, almost all of the new freshmen have indicated their intention to complete the requirements of the Program.

In conclusion, it is hoped that this report of the promises and pitfalls experienced in the establishment of a small university Honors Program will prove beneficial to others planning to implement such a program, or currently experiencing similar problems. Based on conversations the Director has held with other Honors administrators attending both national and regional Honors Council meetings, the problems and potential solutions outlined above are not unique. However, which solutions will work are ultimately dependent upon the environment of faculty, administration, funding, and students particular to each institution.

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